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The CIA at Bay

Congressman Wright Patman, in the course of his deep probe of tax-exempt foundations, is giving the Central Intelligence Agency some embarrassment.

The congressman has turned up information, verified by the Internal Revenue Service, that the CIA was giving money to the J. M. Kaplan Fund, a New York foundation. Or, as Mr. Patman put it, the Kaplan Fund was used "as a conduit for channeling CIA funds."

"We don't know the purpose of this indirect use of taxpayer money. And probably we don't want to know. We are not anxious to uncover the legitimately secret operations of the CIA, which of necessity must be hush-hush."

But Mr. Patman asks why the CIA was spending tax money with a foundation which has been under intensive investigation by both his congressional subcommittee and by the IRS. When Mr. Patman went to CIA for an answer, he didn't get it, he said.

"I feel like I've been trifled with," he said.

Two different directors of IRS have recommended that the Kaplan Foundation's tax-exempt status be revoked, and IRS is still probing.

It does not necessarily follow that whatever service the Kaplan Fund provided the CIA was not worth whatever CIA paid it. But somebody (not us) ought to know.

Once again, we say Congress should set up a watchdog committee to keep tabs on CIA and all the other hush-hush agencies. The public doesn't ask what they are doing, but the public has a right to believe that Congress knows what they are doing, and why. This type of system has worked very well with the Atomic Energy Commission, which is partly secret. It is even more important that there be a check on CIA and like agencies.

The more secret an agency, the more liberties it is likely to take—unless it is accountable to somebody who is accountable to the voters.